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ROB HAVENS '88

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BY ROB HAVENS '88

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ON THE COVER: Joni Taylor is introduced to the 12th Man during halftime of the men's game. Photo by Rob Havens '88

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Howdy Ags!

Wow! What a spring it has been so far! Coach Buzz Williams and his team led us on quite a ride as they put everything together and played really fun basketball to watch. I remember when Buzz first got here, and he would talk about just trying to get a shot on the rim and see what happened. This team opened the eyes of a nation as they battled and won all the way to the SEC Championship game. Then, they turned around and won four in a row to play in the NIT Championship game in Madison Square Garden. It was so much fun watching them play, and we look forward to seeing most of that group return next year to compete again.

We also said so long to Gary Blair as he coached his last game in his hall of fame career. How fitting it is that the basketball court at Reed Arena will from this moment on be known as Gary Blair Court? We hope you enjoy your retirement and we look forward to saying Howdy to you in the stands!

We are so excited to welcome Coach Joni Taylor and her family to Texas A&M. She will now take over the reins to our women's basketball program and work hard to win championships at A&M. Please enjoy the story about her in this issue.

Jimbo Fisher opened spring football again after securing the #1 signing class in the history of college football. Skeptics wonder how he continues to draw such amazing talent to our program. As Jimbo says, "Have you seen a game at Kyle Field before?" Our staff worked really hard to assemble this class and it's a lot of fun to go out to spring football practices to see them work.

Years ago when Alabama or LSU came into Kyle Field we would marvel at the size and speed of their teams. Now when you go to our practices you see that same size and speed with the four and five star talent he has assembled. Get ready folks! With the talent and coaching we have, there is something special about to happen in Aggieland.

Gig'em Ags!

Rob '88



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Aggieland Illustrated is an independently owned, Aggie owned and operated publication and in no way reflects the views or opinions of Texas A&M University.

Aggieland Illustrated (ISSN 1932-9105) is published six times a year in the United States by Aggieland Illustrated, PO Box 6841, Bryan, TX 77805-6841. Reproduction or use of editorial or graphics content in any manner without permission is prohibited. Photographs and manuscripts for publication are welcome but will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Address all subscription inquiries and change of address requests to Aggieland Illustrated, PO Box 6841, Bryan, TX 77805-6841. Allow up to eight weeks for response.

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Volume 16, Number 4

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PROUD **AGGIE MOM**



A photograph of Gary Blair, an older man with white hair, wearing a purple suit and a patterned tie, smiling. He is standing next to a woman with blonde hair, also smiling. They are in a stadium with a large crowd of people in the background.

HAPPY TRAILS TO YOU

Hall of Famer Coach Gary Blair saws 'em off one last time in Reed Arena with his family by his side. Thousands of fans came to wish him well as he trots off into the sunset after his retirement from coaching. The Board of Regents voted to name the basketball court at Reed Arena "Gary Blair Court." After 19 seasons as the head coach, he declared, "We dedicated our lives to this program and A&M and built it on doing things the right way, the Aggie way." As Roy Rogers so eloquently sang, "Happy trails to you until we meet again!" Photo by Rob Havens '88

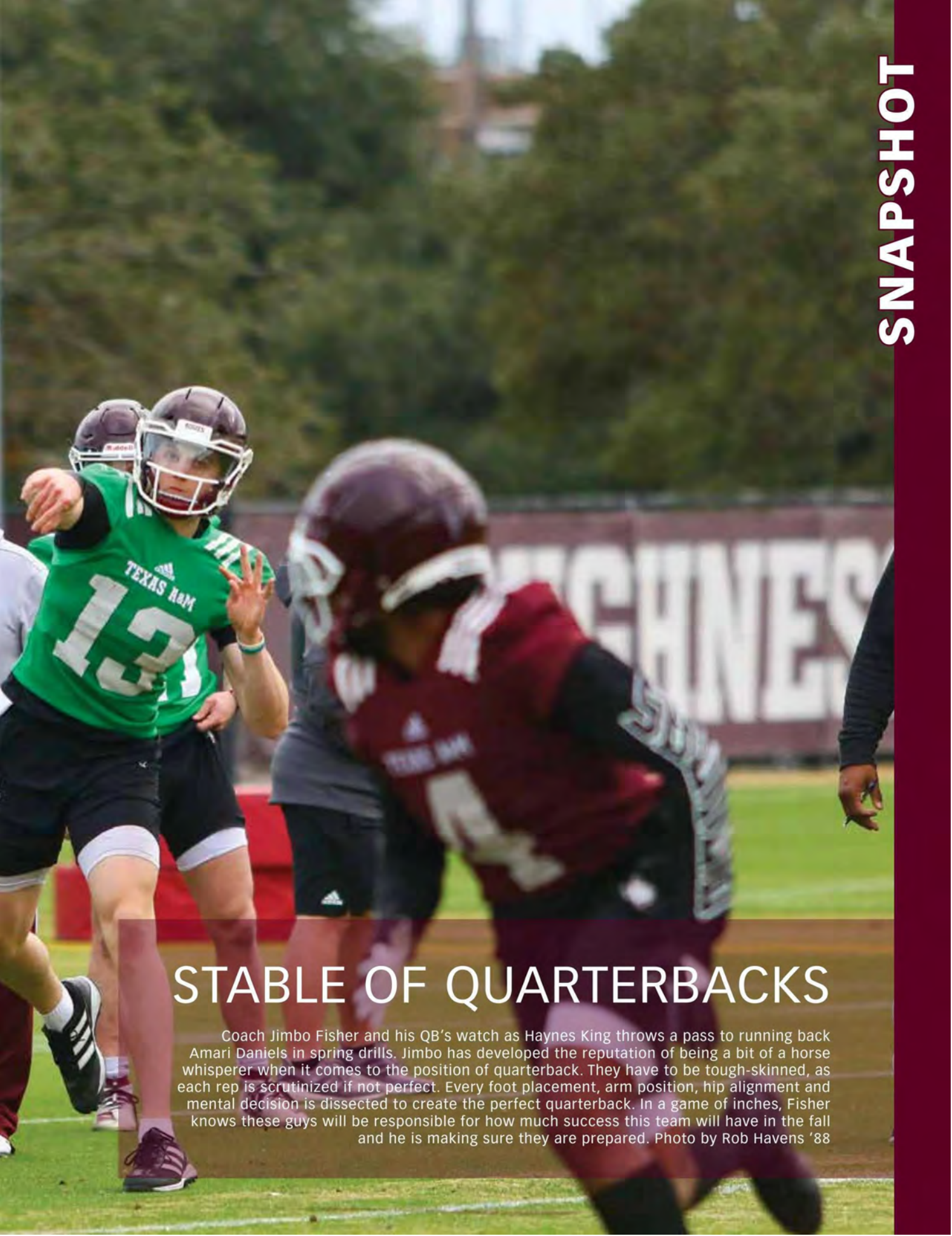


A photograph of a basketball player from behind, wearing a blue jersey with the name 'APPLERY' and the number '22' in orange. The player is on a basketball court during a game, with a large crowd visible in the background. A scoreboard in the distance shows '2-2'. The scene is captured in a moment of high action, likely during a game.

ONE SHINING MOMENT

"It's all on the line. One shining moment, there frozen in time." This snapshot captures those song lyrics as Hassan Diarra elevates over the Gator defenders outstretched hand for his "One Shining Moment." As the capacity crowd held its collective breath the ball rotated through the air and then rattled around the rim before falling through the net, giving the Aggies a three-point lead in overtime with only .4 seconds left in the game. The Ags would go on to win the game over Florida 83-80 and battle their way all the way to the SEC Championship game. Photo by Craig Bisacre courtesy of Aggie Athletics





STABLE OF QUARTERBACKS

Coach Jimbo Fisher and his QB's watch as Haynes King throws a pass to running back Amari Daniels in spring drills. Jimbo has developed the reputation of being a bit of a horse whisperer when it comes to the position of quarterback. They have to be tough-skinned, as each rep is scrutinized if not perfect. Every foot placement, arm position, hip alignment and mental decision is dissected to create the perfect quarterback. In a game of inches, Fisher knows these guys will be responsible for how much success this team will have in the fall and he is making sure they are prepared. Photo by Rob Havens '88



AIMEE
WILSON



GARY
BLAIR



KAYLA
WELLS

SWIMMING & DIVING

Kurtis Mathews became the first male diver to win a national championship when he claimed the 1-meter title in record setting fashion. Just 24 hours later he won his second natty when, on his final dive of his collegiate career, he posted a 91.20 on the 3-meter board. Due to his historic accomplishments, he was named the 2022 CSCAA Division I Men's Diver of the Year.



ANDRES
PUENTE

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

It was a disappointing season for women's basketball as the ladies went 4-12 in conference play and fell to Vanderbilt in the first round of the SEC Tournament. The Aggies finished the regular season with a loss at #20 Georgia 58-67. But the Ags got an up close look at their new coach as they played that game. Just a couple of weeks later Ross Bjork announced that Joni Taylor would be the new head coach at Texas A&M.

BASEBALL

Halfway through the season our baseball team is 17-11, with a series win at LSU and a win in Austin over arch rival tu. In Coach Schlossnagle's first season with the Aggies, the team has struggled with injuries, but they have continued to battle and win games. The bats have come alive and the Aggies have continued to play good defense. The Aggies are hoping to get better on the mound with both starters and the bullpen as they move into the meat of their conference schedule.

TRACK & FIELD

The Aggies hosted the SEC Indoor Championships and pole vaulter Zach Davis took home the individual title with a personal best effort of 17-3/5.26m. On day two of the event, Brandon Miller set an American collegiate 800m record of 1:45.24. The men finished in ninth place. On the women's side, Lamara Distin won the high jump event with a clearance of 6-3.25/1.91m. The ladies finished in seventh place.



TROY
CLAUNCH



JIM
SCHLOSSNAGLE



MATTHIS
ROSS



HALEY
LEE



KOKO
WOOLEY

SCOREBOARD

SOFTBALL

Texas A&M currently has a 23-12 overall record with a 2-7 tally in the conference. The two conference wins are huge, as the Aggies defeated #5 Florida 5-0 at Davis Diamond. Aggie pitcher Makinzy Herzog had a career high 15 strikeouts in the shutout victory. Shaylee Ackerman hit a grand slam in the first inning to give the Aggies all of the runs they would need to beat the Gators. The Ags also clobbered #17 Georgia 16-8 in Athens in just six innings.

MEN'S TENNIS

The tennis team currently sits at 18-10 with a 5-3 conference record. The highlight of the season so far is a 4-3 match win over #8 Georgia at home. The Aggies lost the doubles point in the match and trailed 3-2 with 2 singles matches to play. Junior Guido Marson won the first set in his match, but he dropped the second set and then dominated the third set 6-0 to tie the match at 3-3. With the team victory on his racquet, freshman Giulio Perego won 6-1 in his final set to clinch the win for the Aggies.

WOMEN'S TENNIS

The Aggies continue to win in this historic season. Currently ranked #7 in the country, the Ags have reeled off 15 consecutive victories and finished the home portion of their schedule undefeated. They have won 24 of 25 matches so far, which is the best record in program history to this point in the season. They have won 10 straight in the SEC, which is also a program first.



MARY
STOIANA



RACHEL
HALL



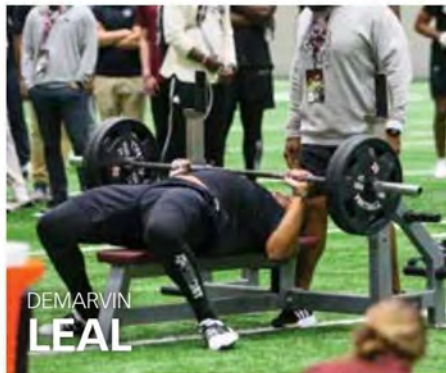
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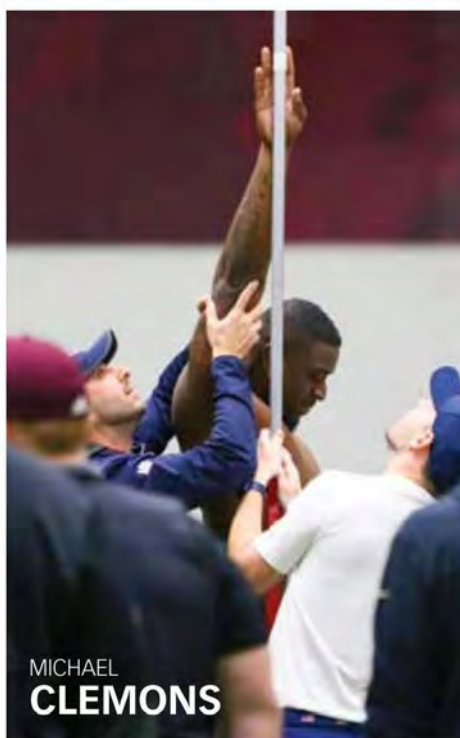
NICK
STARKEL

PRO DAY

Leon O'Neal Jr., Michael Clemons, DeMarvin Leal, Jayden Peevy, Aaron Hansford, Kenyon Green, Jahmir Johnson, Seth Small, Isaiah Spiller and Jalen Wydermyer all participated in Texas A&M Pro Day in front of representatives from all 32 NFL teams. Former QB Nick Starkel came home to Aggieland as well to help our guys showcase their talents in the hope of getting drafted in the upcoming NFL Draft.



LEON
O'NEAL JR.



MICHAEL
CLEMONS



MICHAEL
CLEMONS



ANTONIO
JOHNSON



JIMBO
FISHER



MAX
JOHNSON



HAYNES
KING



RANDY
BOND



EARNEST
CROWOVER



BOBBY
TAYLOR



AINIAS
SMITH



MAX
WRIGHT

SPRING FOOTBALL

On the heels of signing the #1 recruiting class in the nation, the Aggies took the field for spring ball. All eyes are on a quarterback battle that is likely to continue through the summer and into fall camp between Haynes King, LSU transfer Max Johnson and true freshman Conner Weigman. The Aggies have lots of holes to fill but plenty of young talent that are ready to compete for starting jobs.

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DANCE WORTHY

BY ROB HAVENS '88

Against all odds, the Aggies went on a seven-game winning streak that earned them a spot in the SEC Championship game against Tennessee. They defeated #25 Alabama in Tuscaloosa in the second to last game of the regular season before taking out #4 Auburn and #15 Arkansas in the tourney, earning the respect of a nation during a dance worthy run.

Looking back at the season, it was quite the rollercoaster ride for Coach Buzz Williams' team. In the off season, Buzz had to assemble a new team using the transfer portal and figure out how all of the new pieces would fit together with only three returning players that had meaningful playing time on the court.

The Aggies found early success as they went 15-2 including a 4-0 record in the SEC. During that stretch, the team posted wins over teams that received bids to the 2022 NCAA tournament. The Ags beat Notre Dame and Arkansas, and things looked really good for the program. In the fifth game of the conference schedule, the Aggies hosted #12 Kentucky in front of the largest crowd to ever watch a basketball game in Reed Arena. The Aggies played their hearts out and led the contest for most of the game before running out of time and falling just short of their goal.

The loss to the Wildcats started an eight game skid of heartbreaking losses and culminated in a 75-58 loss to #1 Auburn in Alabama. Not only did it not look like the Aggies would play in the post season, there were real doubts if this team would even earn a spot in the SEC tournament.

As Buzz would later recount, this team came together and found the love of the game and the love of working hard and playing for each other and not worrying about anything outside the lines. They brought an end to the losing streak with a one-point win against Florida in Reed Arena. Then, after stumbling against Vandy, they ended the regular season on a four-game winning streak that included a dominating performance over #25 Alabama in Tuscaloosa. It was an eye-opening win that showed everyone when this team played their best they could compete with anyone.

Based on the strong finish it looked like the Aggies were on the bubble and when they landed in Tampa we thought that one win might be enough to earn them a ticket to the Big Dance.





GAME 1

The Aggies came out firing and took control of the game, and it looked as though they would cruise into the next round of the tournament as they led by 10 for most of the second half. But after Q fouled out of the game (his first time to foul out of a Div 1 game) and the pro-Gator crowd got into it, the Gators made the big comeback. The Aggies found themselves in a tie game with just 17 seconds left to play. On the final possession of regulation time, Tyrece Radford drove to the basket and put up a contested floater that bounced off the rim as time expired. The overtime period went back and forth until the Gators had the ball with the score tied, and Phlandrous Fleming Jr. put up a three-point shot that got stuck between the rim and the backboard. The Aggies got possession and Buzz drew up the winning play during a timeout. Radford became the decoy and dribbled the ball on the left side of the floor before spinning around and finding an open Hassan Diarra who calmly took one dribble to the top of the key and launched up a three that rattled in the rim and dropped through the net with 0.4 seconds left to play. The Gators last desperation half court pass was knocked out of bounds, and the Aggies won 83-80 to advance to the second round.

GAME 2

The Aggies entered game 2 with a lot of confidence, but they faced the #1 seed Auburn Tigers who had just handled them a month before, beating them by 17. The Tigers had spent several weeks at number one during the season, and most experts expected them to be a #1 seed in the NCAA tournament. The Aggies took the lead just seconds into the game and never looked back. They made play after play and increased the lead to 20 during the contest led by Tyrece Radford, who had 19 in the game. Late in the second half, Wendell Green Jr caught fire and hit four three-pointers from midcourt logo distance and brought the Tigers within 4 with just :37 to play. But the Aggies would not be denied. A monster dunk from Quenton Jackson and a block from behind highlighted the last few minutes of the game, as the senior sank five key free throws in the last minute to secure the win. In front of another partisan crowd, the Aggies stayed focus and took care of business adding another key win to their resume for the Big Dance. It was the program's first win over a top 5 team in forty years!



#1 AUBURN



GAME 3

Texas A&M was flying high going into game 3 of the SEC Tournament. Having split the regular season series with the Hogs, the Aggies had confidence that they could win. They led this one the whole way, as they played outstanding defense and rained down threes and dunks on the Razorbacks. Quenton Jackson led the team with 20 points and a host of Aggies contributed points including 9 from Hayden Hefner. The Aggies made 8 of 15 from three-point land and dominated the Hogs going away to an 18-point victory. The Razorbacks had won 14 of 16 games to end the regular season including a win over #1 Auburn. With the victory, the Aggies advanced to the title game for the second time since joining the SEC. Experts around the country were saying the Aggies were a lock to make the NCAA tournament after the three big wins and a trip to the championship game.

GAME 4

The Aggies might of run out of gas in the title game, having played four games in just four days. They missed their first eight shots and fell into a 14-0 hole. They missed all nine of their shots from 3-point range and shot only 27% from the field in the first half. The Aggies continued to fight getting as close as five points early in the second half, but it was not to be as the Vols went on to win 65-50. Radford led the Aggies in scoring and Henry Coleman added 12 to help the Aggies cause. Quenton Jackson and Henry Coleman III earned SEC All-Tournament Team honors for their outstanding performance in the tourney.

The Aggies played their hearts out and hoped and anticipated that their performance was enough to earn them an at large bid in the NCAA Tournament, but unfortunately later that day, the Aggies were snubbed by the selection committee. Aggie fans and non-Aggie fans took to social media to convey their feeling about the Aggies being left out, including Dick Vitale who had tweeted before the selection show "Texas A&M went from the BUBBLE BABY to putting on their dancing shoes! They were #awesomebaby!" After the show he posted a picture of the Biggest Snubs and pointed to Texas A&M. On Sunday night the Aggies were rewarded with a #1 Seed in the NIT. Jimbo and his team know all too well about selection committees getting it wrong and how you can't do much about it. But as Aggies we know that this team had an outstanding end to the regular season and a dance worthy finish in the SEC tournament. We are proud of you!



#2 TENNESSEE



COACH JONI TAYLOR

STARTS NEW ERA OF
WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

One of the toughest jobs in sports is finding a replacement for a Hall of Fame coach. Over the last 19 years, Coach Gary Blair resurrected our women's basketball program and elevated it to the top of the mountain by winning a national championship. He put Texas A&M Women's Hoops on the map and struck fear into the hearts of opposing teams that would face the Aggies on the court.

So when Athletic Director Ross Bjork & Deputy Athletics Director Kristen Brown began their search for a new coach, they knew they had big shoes to fill. Bjork explained, "Texas A&M women's basketball stands for excellence and integrity on and off the court. As we began our search to replace Coach Blair, it was so important that we found the right leader and person who would exemplify these same qualities and someone who understood what being an Aggie is all about. Our search included high-profile coaches from around the country, and it was a competitive process until the very end."

Not only were they looking for someone that had the same core values that we have here at A&M, but they were also seeking someone that knew how to win in the SEC, versus the best teams in the country. Ultimately that search revealed the clear choice for the best person to lead our school into a new era, and that was the former head coach of the women's basketball program at Georgia, Joni Taylor.

At the welcome event that the department hosted, Bjork said, "Her passion, energy, knowledge of the game, recruiting acumen, experience in the SEC and leadership in modern day college athletics are all the characteristics that make Coach Taylor the perfect fit for Texas A&M and our basketball program."

A native of Meridian Mississippi, Coach Taylor has grown up, played and coached in the south, and she's been successful at every level. She was named 1997 Mississippi Gatorade Player of the year in 1997 when she attended Meridian High School. Not only did she excel in basketball, she also won three state titles in track & field. She would go onto play college ball at Alabama, where she led the Crimson Tide to four postseason runs and became one of the best players to ever play for the school.

Joni had assistant coaching stints at Troy, Louisiana Tech, Alabama and LSU before joining Coach Andy Landers' staff at Georgia in 2011. When Landers retired in 2015, Taylor was elevated to take over the program and became only the second head coach in school history.

Over the last seven years, Coach Taylor has led her Georgia Bulldogs to 140 wins, including 64 victories in SEC play. She boasts a .651 winning percentage and has taken the Lady Bulldogs to four NCAA Tournaments, including top-four seeds in 2018 and 2021. In 2021, she was named the SEC Coach of the Year and was a finalist for Naismith Coach of the Year.

Coach Taylor took the stage at the welcome event at

Reed Arena and greeted the crowd with a "Howdy!" In front of a large crowd that gathered to greet her, she shared why she decided to come to A&M. "If I was going to leave the position I was in at the institution I was at, which I love, it had to be for the right people and the right place. And I felt that connection more and more as I talked to Ross and Kristen, and it ultimately led me to the decision to take this great opportunity. I am thankful for your belief in me, and the commitment you have given me, and the opportunity to lead this history rich program. Thank you!"

She thanked Coach Blair for not only building the program that she will now lead but also for what he has done for the game of women's basketball and her coaching career as well. She also thanked the 12thMan and expressed her and her family's desire to become a part of all things Aggieland, not just basketball. She addressed the team and thanked them for their willingness to extend grace during a transition process that can be difficult and also talked about the hard work they can expect in an atmosphere of togetherness.

She introduced her husband Darius, two daughters Jacie and Drew and her parents and in-laws as well. Coach Taylor also took the time to address the potential recruits in the state of Texas, calling them "our first priority!" She said they will recruit nationally but high-level recruits in the state are her first target.

"I get asked a lot about my vision for this program," she explained. "It's pretty simple. We want to develop young women that have great character, and who will compete in the classroom and on the court. And that will represent themselves, their families and this university

in a first class manor and be visible in our community. When players leave Aggieland after their career is over we want them to not only leave with a degree but with a love for Texas A&M that is so strong that they cannot stay away..."

She told the assembled crowd, as it pertains to basketball, that she wouldn't make a lot of promises, but she did say, "we are going to play extremely hard. We are going to defend at a high level. We are going to play together as a team and we are going to put a product on the floor you can be proud of and you can be excited to get behind and support."

Coach Taylor even got the stamp of approval from Gary Blair who said, "I think it's a very good hire because she's one of the, not the rising stars because she's been a star for a long time. I think she's gonna bring a lot to Texas A&M. Recruiting wise, a new thing, she's a defensive first coach, hopefully she can play the defense like Coach Buzz's team played last night... I've known her a long time.. She's covered the south from Mississippi to Alabama to Georgia to here. She knows where to end up and it's right here!"

Coach Taylor sees the move to A&M as an opportunity and is not fearful of following a legend like Gary Blair. "I think it's an honor that I'm in a position to be at an institution that had a legend and I have the opportunity to follow behind and learn from and continue to enhance what was created here... I want to be involved in a program that has that type of tradition and that type of history...I think it's a great thing!" We are so excited to have her here as she begins a new era of Texas A&M Women's Basketball. ■





NIT

MEN'S BASKETBALL GOES ALL THE WAY TO THE BIG APPLE

BY ROB HAVENS '88

Our men's basketball team showed the heart of a champion by putting the disappointment of not getting into The Big Dance aside and making it all the way to New York City. The Aggies played in 11 games in March with their season on the line and a total of 40 games during the season. A feat that Buzz Williams said he hasn't experienced before, "I've never coached 40 games and obviously, a lot of things have to work out in your favor to even get to 40 games."

After losing to Tennessee in the Championship game of the SEC Tournament, the Aggies stuck around to watch the selection show for March Madness. When their name was not announced, they returned to College Station exhausted and disappointed. Coach Williams decided that the best way to move forward after playing four games in four days was to give his guys some rest before playing Alcorn St just two days later in the opening round of the NIT Tournament.

The Aggies battled through the first game using a second half 10-0 spurt to overtake the Braves 74-62. After the game Coach Williams gave a seven-minute emotional speech in response to the snub the Aggies received by the NCAA selection committee. He passed out a nine-page packet of info giving statistics of the Aggies and the other teams that made the tournament. After studying all of the numbers Buzz declared, "what has transpired is wrong!" He laid out a statistically accurate explanation that left no doubt that the team deserved a spot in the tourney. He concluded his speech by saying, "despite how disenchanted I have become with all of this I will always stand up for our players and the families they represent. Regardless of the opinion of anyone, that is the least that I can do. Our focus is now on what we can control."

And that's exactly what they did.

They focused on each opponent and continued to play inspired basketball throughout the tournament. They dominated the Oregon Ducks 75-60, and then blew out the Deacons of Wake Forest 67-52 to earn a trip to The Big Apple.

Their dominating play continued as they beat up on Washington St in the NIT semifinal game 72-56 to earn a spot in the championship game. A team that looked as if they might not play a single post-season game had become one of only six NCAA teams to still be playing basketball on March 31st.

The Aggies battled hard in the championship game against Xavier but came up just short as seven footer Jack Nunge hit a closely guarded off balanced fall away hook shot from about 10 feet away with 3.1 seconds to win the game. The Aggies final shot from Tyrece Radford was in and out of the rim as time expired.

It was a heartbreaking finale to an amazing season ending run that saw the Aggies win 11 out of their last 13 games.



Buzz said after the game, "this is my 28th year in college coaching and I've never experienced anything like what has transpired within our team over the last six weeks. The belief, the work, the trust, the love, player to player, coach to coach, player to coach, could coach to player has scarred my heart in a way that I'll never, ever forget and I'm thankful for over the last six weeks, how I believed that it's changed our program forever."

The future looks bright as the Aggies should return 4 of 5 starters and a host of bench players that had significant contributions this season. We look forward to next season as the Aggies work together to win championships.

Q&A

TREVOR WERNER



WHEN DID YOU START PLAYING BASEBALL?

Oh wow, as long as I can remember I've always played. I think I started in a church league when I was three or four years old. I have a picture of the day I was born wearing a baseball uniform with a little bat and ball. So it's literally been as long as I can remember.

DID YOU PLAY OTHER SPORTS IN HIGH SCHOOL?

I actually didn't. I was straight baseball. I knew what I wanted to do after high school so I put all of my effort and time into one thing to be the best that I could.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO COME TO A&M?

It was pretty early on. Probably when I was 11 or 12 or maybe even younger than that. My cousin played here in 2009 – 2011. So I grew up coming to games and stuff. Grew up around the atmosphere. Lots of cousins came to A&M, went to school here. And then I grew up watching him play back then. Growing up around the 12th Man and just seeing all of the cool traditions. And then it definitely helped that we are in the SEC, the best conference in America. Getting to play in front of amazing fans, going to an amazing school in the best conference in the nation. And it's right down the road from where I'm from, which made that decision a lot easier.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR RECRUITING PROCESS.

I committed here January 28th of 2018, which was my junior year of high school. My recruiting process was not very interesting, pretty boring straight up.

I went to a showcase camp and A&M and Sam Houston were both there. Actually a funny story about that, so I was recruited by Coach Seely when he was here and I went to the camp. He came up to me and was like you're really like, your swing and everything just reminds me of a guy that use to play for us, Adam Smith. No way, that's my cousin, I said. He was like that's crazy. Your makeup and your body and your swing; it just reminds me of him. So that was kind of cool. Then after that camp I got invited to the showcase camp at each school and went to those. I went to the one at Sam Houston first,

and they offered me, and then a couple weeks later came here, and A&M offered me and more. So that made that decision easy. A&M was pretty much my number one dream school, so I didn't really venture out to other schools, I knew what I wanted and I committed.

IN HIGH SCHOOL YOU PLAYED IN THE FIELD AND PITCHED, SO TELL ME WHAT WERE YOUR EXPECTATIONS COMING HERE IN BEING A POSITION PLAYER OR PITCHING?

When I was recruited it was just as a position player. And then I remember a couple of weeks after my visit Coach Seely texted me, "Hey do you pitch too?" and I was like yeah, I actually do. So I sent a couple of videos of a bullpen and when they offered me, they mentioned that I would be doing both and I was fine with that. I did it in high school a little bit. I definitely played as a position more and kind of pitched to close out games here and there if we needed to. But my role is pretty clear you know: come in and do both. So I've always kind of done that in my career.

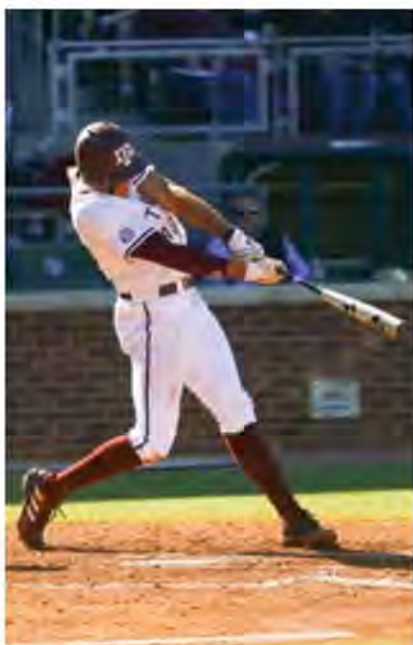
SO WHEN DID BEING THE THIRD BASEMAN FOR SCHLOSS HAPPEN?

I would say early in the fall. They had me play a little first base because the pitching role was still in there. And then late fall, they moved me back over to third. They just felt like I could lock down the corner over there, and they felt like the pitching staff could handle their own. My having to play first base wasn't really in the picture anymore. So I moved over to third and just continued to get better each and everyday in the fall and then came back and did my thing early in the spring and continued to show improvement both defensively and offensively and it just all came together.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PRIOR COACHING STAFF AND THE CURRENT COACHING STAFF?

That's a good question. I mean both staffs were great. I love Coach Childress and playing for his staff my first two years here. I would say with Coach Schloss there's a big emphasis on each individual player's development.

Like he knows that each player has something they need to work on. I guarantee you that if you went to him and asked, "hey what does this guy need to work on?" He could tell you like each individual player, like this guy needs to get better at this. He always reminds us that everyday he wakes up and imagines us being the best version of ourselves as a baseball player and as a human. So that's huge, having a coach that believes in you and trusts in the process of developing as a player. And literally, as he has gotten here, he has done everything in his will to give us the best resources I think they have spent a bunch of money on equipment for the cages and every since he got here he's worked on a bunch of stuff weather that be redoing the floor redoing the facility making it look nice. And then they are getting right on the plans to build a new stadium. I've already noticed in the first week of the season how much they have done to get people to come to the games. They just draw a crowd, and he wants to make Aggie baseball a huge part of College Station. ■



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AQUATICS

BY ROB HAVENS '88

Rec Sports Aquatics offers numerous programs to help you improve your techniques in the water. We visited with Carlos Garcia (Director of Aquatics) and CJ Stancheski (Assistant Director, Aquatic Events & Programs) to find out more about all the things available for members and non-members at the Rec. "Rec Sports has five pools and two spas. We host a variety of programs such as Health & Kinesiology classes, and various sport clubs including men's and women's water polo, club swim, and triathlon who utilize our facilities for practices and competition. Our own programming includes lifeguard classes and learn-to-swim courses for adult and youth, in both a group and private format," explained Stancheski. You will also find students taking scuba through Health & Kinesiology using the pool to learn how to scuba dive, and because the Rec owns the equipment, they are

able to help those students get certified using Lake Blue Lagoon or Lake Travis.

Of course, the Rec is the home of Texas A&M Swimming and Diving Team, which they use for practices as well as competitive meets. Recreational swim is available for students, members and non-members looking for a workout. Pool availability schedules are listed online, Garcia told us, "We alternate the pools to give ample time to clean the bodies of water and to clean the deck which is something that has been an ongoing practice since COVID-19. Regardless of the time of day, there is always a pool available for swimmers."

For those seeking lifeguard certification or enrollment in adult or youth learn-to-swim class, they are available for both members and nonmembers and information is available online at <https://recsports.tamu.edu/programs/aquatics/>.

Registration for the July youth learn-to-swim program opens May 1; classes will run from July 11 - 21, 2022.

For Texas A&M students looking for a job this summer or in the fall, Rec Sports Aquatics will waive the cost of your lifeguard certification if you commit to a semester's worth of work. The next certification is scheduled for August course for those interested in working for Rec Sports beginning in September.

So, whether you are a student or on staff at A&M, member or non-member, Rec Sports Aquatics has something for you. It's time to dive in!



WATERSKI CLUB

BY ROB HAVENS '88

Anyone who has ever water-skied would probably agree that it is one of the coolest feelings in the world. Racing behind a boat with the wind and mist spraying on you as you navigate the wake and cut through the water on one or two skis is an adrenaline rush and something that thousands of people enjoy every year.

The skill required to get up and stay up can be challenging for the beginning skier. For those that have the skills to compete on the water, like the members of the Texas A&M Water Ski Club, it takes a whole other level of talent, hard work, and a lot of guts.

The current club has 40 to 45 skiers. The club was founded in 1975 by Elgin Faulkner, who according to team president Zach Butterfield, is a waterskiing legend in Texas. Zach said "He is pushing 90 years old and still skis competitively and sets national records in his age division."

The members compete in three-event waterskiing tournaments, which include slalom, trick, and jump competitions. Skiers also compete for an overall title

as they accumulate points in the three events.

The jump event title is awarded to the skier who jumps the farthest, no style points are earned. In trick skiing, each trick has a predetermined point value, and a skier attempts to perform as many tricks as they can in their 20 second run. The slalom competition involves an opening gate, a course of six buoys, and a closing gate. A skier must complete a pass through the course, and after each run the speed of the boat increases or the rope is shortened to make it more difficult. If a skier fails in a pass their run is over. The winner of the event is the skier that gets the most buoys at the most difficult pass.

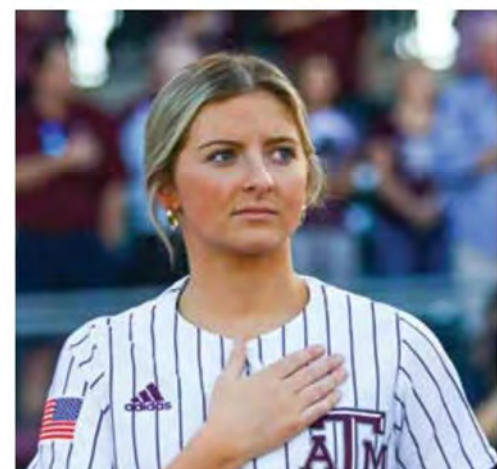
We asked Butterfield what his favorite memories of being on the team and he replied, "My favorite moments on the team both came at the 2021 Nationals in October. The first was acting as yell leader alongside my teammate Dwight Emerson as our team claimed the coveted HO Skis Spirit Award for the second time since its introduction in 2017. This also made

us the first team to win the award twice. The second was the minutes immediately following my jump set in which I achieved a new personal best under collegiate rules with a 159-foot jump. The entire team rallied around and celebrated with me, and I've never experienced anything close to that level of companionship before in my entire life of waterskiing."

Zach told us that a lot of people who join the club have never competed in watersports before, and they are happy to welcome them in and teach them about the sport they love. "Our dream is to grow the sport back to what it once was. We know it's a niche sport that most people have never even heard of, but no one could convince any of us that it's not the greatest sport in the world."







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